TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER

September 9, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write again today on the most urgent matter that I had previously brought to your attention – the need for the immediate release of CRP lands for emergency grazing and haying.

I submitted this request to you on May 5, 2009, to which you responded on June 29 instructing me to redirect that request to your staff in the Texas office of USDA's Farm Service Agency. I complied with that instruction and formalized my request to your staff on July 17. Last week, I received a response from that office indicating they submitted back to your national office a recommendation to approve my request and that your staff in DC denied this important request. Mr. Secretary, I am familiar with government processes, but I think you would agree with me this has been an extremely bureaucratic process in an attempt to find a most necessary solution.

Further, I am aware of precedent for approving similar requests. Although I am told the reasons for denial are tied to specific program parameters on a county-by-county basis, USDA has in fact approved emergency CRP haying and grazing on a statewide basis for severe droughts such as this in previous years. I am appealing to you today to utilize that authority to help Texas agriculture today, just as I intended with my May 5 letter, which only started a circular process that leads us back to where we began.

As you know the state of Texas has been the single driest portion of the Unites States since January 2009. The measured losses to Texas agriculture are approaching $4.1 billion. That is approximately 25 percent of the 2008 cash receipts for Texas agriculture.

Your staff has only expressed a willingness to approve counties for emergency haying and grazing where the drought is most extreme and therefore forage in the CRP land is limited. These circumstances are dire. Herds are being reduced daily, the herd population is shrinking and there is no relief in sight. Texas is the largest cattle producer in the nation and we ask for your immediate assistance. We must have access to any and all forage within reasonable distances of these drought counties.

P.O. Box 12847 Austin, Texas 78711 (512) 463-7476 Fax: (888) 223-8861
For the Hearing Impaired: (800) 735-2989 (TTY)
www.tda.state.tx.us

I am thankful and most appreciative of the recent changes to assist in identifying school meal solutions in times of school dismissals related to potential H1N1 flu outbreaks. Please know this drought is an agriculture crisis on the same level of a potential flu pandemic and releasing this acreage for emergency grazing and haying is a no-cost element. I cannot over emphasize the need for your assistance.

Yours truly,

Todd Staples

TS/DD/lsm